

A GUIDE FOR JEWISH - CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

OPEN DOORS OPEN MINDS



We must reach out to our neighbors and listen for God's presence in their voices. Only in this way, speaking our fears while hearing the fears of others, will we build a shared commitment to a moral future.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie

A stylized graphic of a hand holding a scroll, rendered in a dark brown color. The hand is positioned on the right side, with the thumb and index finger gripping the edge of a scroll that extends across the bottom of the page. The background of the scroll is filled with faint, repeating text in both English and Hebrew, suggesting a shared study or dialogue. The overall design is minimalist and symbolic, representing the act of holding and sharing knowledge or sacred texts.

SYNAGOGUES & CHURCHES STUDYING TOGETHER

I ask this Assembly to recommend that each of our member congregations invite a church in their community to participate in a dialogue during the coming year. This initiative will require the participation of rabbis, cantors, ministers, and priests, but is directed primarily at congregational members.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie

INTRODUCTION

At the 2003 Biennial Convention of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) its president, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, called on all the synagogues of the Reform Jewish Movement to expand interfaith dialogues and cooperative work. This call rose from conversations with Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant leaders about the need for increased communication. Leaders of some of the largest Christian denominations in the United States have formally endorsed Rabbi Yoffie's call.



Following Rabbi Yoffie's call for increased dialogue, *Open Doors, Open Minds*, a seven-session adult education dialogue program was created to serve as a foundation for synagogues and churches to engage in dialogue. The goal was both profound and simple: to foster mutual understanding and appreciation between Jews and Christians, and to dispel xenophobia and misunderstanding. It was aimed at helping participants understand how our faiths are actively lived – to see how our beliefs, values, hopes, and doubts shape our individual and communal lives.

After completing *Open Doors, Open Minds I*, many congregations were eager to continue their relationships with each other. The Commission on Interreligious Affairs of Reform Judaism is, therefore, releasing a second curriculum, *Open Doors, Open Minds II*. This guide, building on the relationships and learning established in the first one, provides participants with the opportunity to dialogue about four important modern-day issues. Each session makes use of religious texts, popular culture, and interactive activities to explore these timely topics in depth. By focusing on shared values and a commitment to making the world a better place, participants will gain a new understanding of both their own and one another's religious tradition.

The sessions are organized thematically:

Session One: Poverty

Session Two: The Environment

Session Three: War and Peace

Session Four: Death Penalty

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Open Doors, Open Minds I helped Christians and Jews to forge relationships based on open communication about religious issues. Working at the congregational level we have begun to understand one another better and build a sense of trust among community members. We have increased respect for one another's traditions and gained greater insight into our own beliefs as well. Having accomplished this by focusing on the three central concerns of *Open Doors Open Minds I* – who we are, what we think, and how we act – we are ready to use *Open Doors, Open Minds II* to delve deeply into specific, contemporary issues to further our understanding of one another.

For this second curriculum guide, we have chosen four social justice issues of concern in the world today. While we often may think about these issues in a secular context, by formulating our ideas within a religious framework based on religious texts, we can gain a broader understanding of the subject matter and how our political views may be informed by our religious beliefs.

Social justice values are based in our religious texts and traditions. Learning what religious scholars of the past believed about such issues can strengthen and invigorate our commitment to working for these causes. The social justice issues of today are not simply passing concerns but have engaged religious thinkers throughout history, especially those with strong convictions to repair the world. As people of faith, Christians and Jews may study these traditions together, finding common points of connection and ways to work together. In this respect, the curriculum also challenges participants to go beyond dialogue to act on their social justice values by engaging in an ongoing social action project. Jointly shared initiatives thus benefit the larger community and the dialogue participants.

While we have seen that we have much in common in our shared texts and many of our social values, there are also issues on which we are divided. Such division is not a negative component in our relationship, but rather provides us with space to understand one another's traditions and respect one another for our religious convictions. Participants' attitudes may be divided on certain issues, and not necessarily along religious lines. The goal of this program is not to come to the single truth of what either religion believes about a given issue, but rather to engage in a dialogue in which all opinions are heard and respected. There will likely be ambiguity in some of the issues discussed, but exploring this gray area allows for compelling dialogue and stronger comprehension of the issue.

It will be important in many of the sessions to draw clear distinctions of where Christians and Jews differ. While this sounds paradoxical at first, by highlighting these differences we can come to a more comprehensive understanding of one another's religious tradition and of our own. Without bringing these differences to the forefront and exploring both areas of agreement

and divergence, participants may continue to hold stereotypes of one another based on their preconceived notions. It may be helpful to ask at the beginning of each session: “Would we expect Christians and Jews to come to different conclusions on this? How would we expect them to differ?” Reflecting at the end of each session it may be helpful to close by asking: “How are our initial impressions different from our current understanding of the topic? Were we correct in our assumptions of one another’s (and our own) tradition?”

USING THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum provides flexibility for participating congregations. Four topics have been prepared, but each community need not do every topic. Additionally, each topic can be covered in either one or two sessions. If a certain topic seems more interesting to a group, they can spread the material out over two weeks, allowing more time to discuss the issue. Time schedules for each of these options are included. Please note that these are just suggestions; facilitators are free to adjust the timing and format as desired. We suggest allotting an hour and a half if you choose to do the topic in one session and one hour and fifteen minutes per session if you choose to do it in two. Multiple questions are provided for each text, but groups should not feel obligated to discuss every question. Rather, they should pick and choose based on interest, which also will help move the session along and keep to the given time frame. Optimally, sessions will alternate between the synagogue and the church. The program can also be held in participants’ homes.

You may want to launch and/or conclude the program with a separate session or extend the first and/or last sessions by 30 minutes. An introductory conversation would give participants an overview of the program and topics covered and provide an opportunity to choose the topics on which to focus. A concluding session would allow time to reflect on the experience as a whole and discuss next steps for the dialogue group.

As with *Open Doors, Open Minds I*, while the presence of clergy is strongly encouraged, it is not necessary for the success of this dialogue since the sessions are designed to be led by lay facilitators. (Clergy, however, can be particularly helpful to participants as they wrestle with some of the more complex issues discussed in the sessions.) For each session, a different participant might be chosen to act as a facilitator, or the group might rotate between two good facilitators, one from each community. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that all



participants have the opportunity to contribute and for keeping the discussion moving. The facilitator should feel free to allow more or less time for a section, according to group interest. Similarly, if there is insufficient time to discuss all of the topics or all the discussion questions in a session, the facilitator should feel free to skip topics or questions in order to give sufficient time to those that can be addressed

effectively. The facilitator should pay special attention to text in italics: while these passages are generally explanatory and do not need to be read aloud, they will help the facilitator guide discussion and help the participants know what is expected of them. Before each session, facilitators should review the texts and watch the video clips in order to run the session more effectively.

We suggest that you participate in *Open Doors, Open Minds I* before running *Open Doors, Open Minds II*. The conversations of *Open Doors, Open Minds I* serve as an important foundation on which to base further dialogue. However, such participation is not a prerequisite and you may choose not to do so. If this program is the first time your synagogue and church are working together or that individual participants have met one another, we encourage you to begin with a more general orientation session. One possible framework for this meeting is to use the beginning of Session One of *Open Doors, Open Minds I*. In this introduction (reprinted as Appendix A) participants explore their names and family histories, religious upbringing and practice and the role of study in the Jewish and Christian traditions.

NOTES ON USAGE

Open Doors, Open Minds II makes use of a wide array of resources. In preparing it, we have drawn upon the best work done by many scholars who have made increasing interreligious understanding and social justice their life's work.

In addition to these scholarly sources, each session uses a short video clip from a popular movie. For your convenience, we have provided these clips on DVD. Please keep in mind that due to copyright restrictions, these clips are only to be used for educational purposes. To obtain a copy of the movie clips please contact the Commission on Interreligious Affairs at interreligious@urj.org.



Please note: There has been much recent discussion about how our language addresses gender, both when referring to humans and to God. Some people choose to describe God in gender-neutral terms, such as “Eternal.” Others prefer to use gender-specific language for God, such as “He” or “Father.” During discussions, we ask participants to use whatever is most comfortable for them and to be respectful of others’ preferences. The curriculum itself generally uses gender-neutral language.

Within each session, texts for discussion appear indented. Each passage is followed by a brief parenthetical citation; complete bibliographical information is available at the end of the packet. Where longer texts are used, the facilitator has several options. The texts might be assigned to be read as “homework” at the prior session, they might be read silently by each participant during the session, or they might be read aloud during the session, with each participant reading one paragraph at a time. Discussion sections are located below each passage next to the

talk bubble with the questions bolded. Italicized paragraphs contain introductory information that the facilitator may want to read ahead of time and then share briefly with participants.

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

(from the Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, adapted from Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20/1:1-4.)

1. Enter into dialogue so that **you** can learn and grow; not to change the other.
2. Be conscious of the need to allow people the space to enter the discussion. Some people are more sheepish about offering their thoughts, but will be encouraged to do so if more outspoken persons avoid dominating the exchange.
3. Be honest and sincere, even if that means revealing discomforts with your own tradition or that of the other. Assume that everyone else is being equally honest and sincere.
4. Everyone must be permitted to define his or her own religious experience and identity, and this must be respected by others.
5. Proselytizing or seeking to "convert" the conversation partner is not permitted in an interreligious dialogue setting. Participants should feel free to express their own faith traditions and beliefs, but not try to persuade others to assent to them.
6. Don't feel that you are the spokesperson for your entire faith tradition or that you ought somehow to know everything there is to know about it. Admit any confusion or uncertainty you might have if a puzzling question arises.
7. Don't assume in advance where points of agreement or disagreement will exist.
8. Everyone should be willing to be self-critical.
9. All should strive to experience the other's faith "from within" and be prepared to view themselves differently as a result of an "outside" perspective.
10. Trust is a must.

* * *

It is our hope that through this encounter and conversation, Jews and Christians might better learn to see each other as bearers of traditions worthy of study and understanding, to appreciate similarities and respect differences. This new era of engagement and hope can help in the ongoing process of eclipsing centuries of enmity, but only if the real work is now done in the pews and in our homes.

SESSION 1: POVERTY

Overview: According to the U.S. Census Bureau, during the year 2004 the official poverty rate in the United States was 12.7%. That means that some 37 million people lived below the poverty line. This percentage was much higher among African-Americans (24.7%) and Hispanics (21.9%) than among whites (8.6%). Children under the age of 18 are also at a significantly higher risk of living in poverty – 17.8% as compared to 11.3% for those aged 18 to 64.

The Jewish community is not immune to the poverty found in North America. A United Jewish Communities report in 2004 found that about 7% of American Jewish households have incomes that fall below the federal government's official poverty line and 14% are placed in the category of "low income." Poverty is a prime concern for the Christian community as well. In the year 2000, for example, the National Council of Churches Executive Board pledged to spend the next ten years working to overcome poverty in the United States.

*As people of faith, we have an obligation to care for those who do not have the same advantages that we do. In learning what the Jewish and Christian traditions say about poverty, we can join together to find a way to solve the problem of poverty in America. ****Participants are asked to bring some non-perishable food items with them to donate to a food pantry.***

Time schedule for one session:

0:00-0:05 Welcome; Overview of session

0:05-0:20 Poverty in the Bible – text study in pairs

0:20-0:40 Watch movie clip and discuss (choose 2 of the 5 questions)

0:40-0:55 A Religious Reaction to Poverty – divide into four groups, each discussing one text

0:55-1:10 Each group shares the main points from their text with the larger group

1:10-1:20 A Christian and Jewish Joint Commitment to Justice

1:20-1:30 Activity: Addressing Poverty on a National Level

Time schedule for two sessions:

Week 1

0:00-0:10 Welcome; Overview of session

0:10-0:25 Poverty in the Bible – text study in pairs

0:25-0:45 Group discussion of Biblical texts

0:45-1:15 Watch movie clip and discuss

Week 2

0:00-0:10 Review of previous week's discussion

0:10-0:25 A Religious Reaction to Poverty – divide into four groups, each discussing one text

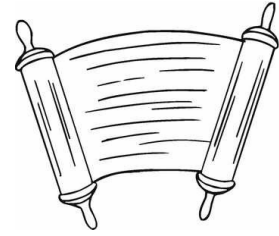
0:25-0:50 Each group shares the main points from their text with the larger group and discusses

0:50-1:00 A Christian and Jewish Joint Commitment to Justice

1:00-1:15 Activity: Addressing Poverty on a National Level

POVERTY IN THE BIBLE

The following verses from the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament address the issue of poverty.



Leviticus 19:9-10

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Eternal am your God.

Deuteronomy 15:4-11

There shall be no needy among you—since the Eternal your God will bless you in the land that the Eternal your God is giving you as a hereditary portion—if only you heed the Eternal your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. For the Eternal your God will bless you as promised: you will extend loans to many nations but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you. If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kin in any of your settlements in the land that the Eternal your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kin. Rather, you must open your hand and lend whatever is sufficient to meet the need...Give readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Eternal your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kin in your land.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

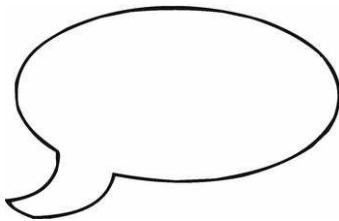


And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little." (Ex. 16:18)



Discussion:

1. Leviticus 19 commands the Israelites to leave the corners of their fields for the poor and the stranger. **Why might the text make such a commandment? What does it mean for us not to reap the corners of our fields today? What are our "gleanings?"**

2. The text from Deuteronomy begins by suggesting that there will be no needy among the Israelites. **Is this statement conditional? Do the Israelites have to do anything in return? If so, what do they have to do? What is our responsibility to act in order to end poverty?**

3. The first verse declares that "there shall be no needy among you," but then goes on to describe what to do "if there is a needy person among you" and says that "there will never cease to be needy ones in your land." **How can you resolve this apparent contradiction?**

Consider the following commentary (which is based on classical Jewish commentaries) as one possible solution to the contradiction.

"There shall be no needy among you." Should Israel be faithful to the law of God, there will be no poor to borrow among them, and the law concerning the cancellation of debts will find no application.

"There will never cease to be needy ones in your land." Though they were promised that if they kept God's commandments there would be no needy among them, it is here taken for granted that not for all time will all people lead such an ideal life. Poverty must, therefore, be regarded as an existing evil at some place or at some period.

(Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch. The Soncino Chumash. Ed. Rev. Dr. A Cohen. Soncino Press)

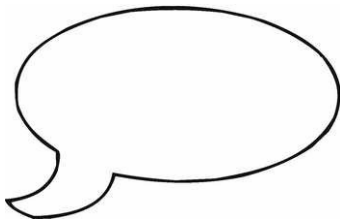
4. According to the passage from Corinthians, what is the responsibility of the poor to give to others? Do you think this is a fair expectation? Why or why not? What does it mean that giving is not a “commandment”?

5. What is the goal of giving described here? Is this a realistic goal in today’s society? How can we work together to reach it?

MOVIE CLIP: THE MANY CHALLENGES OF POVERTY



For those living in poverty, the day-to-day struggles can be very difficult. It is more than just a matter of having a place to live and food to eat. Watch the scenes from *Cinderella Man* (32:10-44:33) which depict the difficulties of a family facing poverty. Although the movie is set during the Great Depression, the trials the family faces are not unique to that time period. The multitudes of people living in poverty today deal with many of these same problems.



Discussion:

1. In the opening scene when the man comes to turn off the electricity and heat to the house, May pleads with him not to turn it off because of her children. He responds that he also has a family and if he doesn't comply with his orders, he will lose his job. **What is the responsibility of one individual to help another when the person doesn't even have enough for him or herself? Is even a poor person expected to help the poor? Is the man from the electric company wrong? What should he have done in this situation?**

2. Referring to his wages covering the family's expenses, Jim says to his wife, "If I worked 26 hours out of every 24 it still wouldn't add up." **What does this comment depict about people living in poverty? Can we assume that poor people are not willing to work hard to make a living? What is the responsibility of society to provide a living wage for people who work? Who determines the meaning of "a living wage?"**

3. May decides to send the kids to relatives because there is no heat and their son Howard is getting sick. She fears that if he gets really sick, she won't be able to call the doctor because the family already owes him money. **How does living in poverty affect people when they become ill? How is the situation different for those who can afford health care? In your opinion, is access to health care a universal right? Why or why not?**

4. As Jim walks around trying to figure out how he will get enough money to turn the electricity back on, we briefly see a family walking from their fancy apartment building to their car carrying many boxes and gifts. **What does this show about the gap between the rich and the poor in this country? Is this scenario still realistic today? What can we do to lessen this situation?**

5. Jim decides to go on public assistance and beg for money to make ends meet. **How do you think it would feel to be in this situation? Do you think you would be able to put yourself in such a position? How do you feel when others beg you for money?**

A RELIGIOUS REACTION TO POVERTY

As noted in the Biblical texts, one way to rid the world of poverty is to give to others. The following texts explore the reasoning behind charity, or tzedakah as it is commonly referred to in Judaism. The Jewish and Christian approaches to giving to others contain many similarities as well as some subtle differences.

While tzedakah is often translated as "charity," that definition does not communicate the full meaning of the Hebrew word.

Tzedakah literally means "righteousness" – doing the right thing. A *tzaddik*, likewise, is a righteous person, someone who fulfills all his or her obligations, whether in the mood or not.

The verse says: "*Tzedek, tzedek* you shall pursue" – Justice, justice you shall pursue (Deut. 16:20). There's a basic human responsibility to reach out to others. Giving of your time and your money is a statement that "I will do whatever I can to help."

The Torah recommends giving 10 percent. (Hence the popular expression "tithe," meaning one-tenth.) The legal source is Deut. 14:22, and the Bible is filled with examples: Abraham gave Malki-Tzedek one-tenth of all his possessions (Genesis 14:20); Jacob vowed to give one-tenth of all his future acquisitions to the Almighty (Genesis 29:22); there are mandated tithes to support the Levites (Numbers 18:21, 24) and the poor (Deut. 26:12).

Ten percent is the minimum obligation to help. For those who want to do more, the Torah allows you to give 20 percent. But above that amount is unrealistic. If you give too much, you'll come to neglect other aspects of your life.

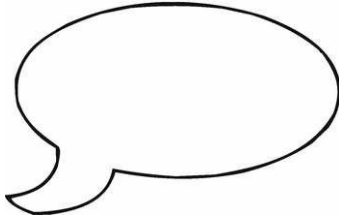
Of course, don't just impulsively give your money away. The Almighty provides everyone with income, but it comes conditionally: Ten percent is a trust fund that you're personally responsible to disperse. God is expecting you to spend [God's] money wisely...

Tzedakah begins at home. If your parents are hungry, [feeding them] comes before giving to a homeless shelter. From there, it is concentric circles outward: your community, then your country and so on....

Tzedakah is not only helping people financially, it's also making them feel good. If a hungry person asks for food, and you give it to him with a resentful grunt, you've lost

the *mitzvah* [commandment]. Sometimes giving an attentive ear or a warm smile is more important than money. You can also protect someone's self-esteem by giving even before he asks. The bottom line is that every person has unique needs, and it is our obligation to help each one accordingly.

(Rabbi Shraga Simmons. "Charity versus Tzedakah." <http://judaism.about.com/>)



Discussion:

1. Discuss the difference between *tzedakah* and charity. How do the implications of these terms affect how you give to others? Do you think it is better to give out of emotion or obligation? Does it matter to the recipient?

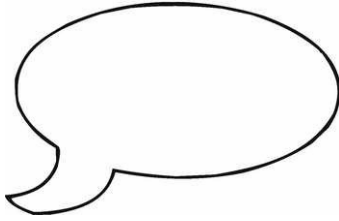
2. How does *tzedakah* go beyond giving money? How can you incorporate the different aspects of *tzedakah* into your life?

3. The passage describes a hierarchy of giving to *tzedakah* (first to your family, then to the community, etc.). Do you agree that such a hierarchy should exist? Do you feel an obligation to your home community before the more general population? What about those people who do not have close relatives or a community from whom to receive *tzedakah*?

Christianity also places an emphasis on giving to the poor as seen in this statement from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable. From the Scriptures and church teaching, we learn that the justice of a society is tested by the treatment of the poor. The justice that was the sign of God's covenant with Israel was measured by how the poor and unprotected -- the widow, the orphan, and the stranger -- were treated. The kingdom that Jesus proclaimed in his word and ministry excludes no one. Throughout Israel's history and in early Christianity, the poor are agents of God's transforming power. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor" (Lk. 4:18). This was Jesus' first public utterance. Jesus takes the side of those most in need. In the Last Judgment, so dramatically described in St. Matthew's Gospel, we are told that we will be judged according to how we respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger. As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental "option for the poor" -- to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This "option for the poor" does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are the most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of *all* our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.

(National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USA), *A Pastoral Message: Economic Justice for All.*)



Discussion:

1. **How do Christian teachings inform the treatment of the poor? How is Jesus an example to Christians for both poverty and charity? How does this view differ from Jewish teachings?**
2. **Why do you think giving to the needy is such a high priority that it will even determine ones fate in the Last Judgment? Do you think it should take priority over all other issues? Why or why not?**
3. **What does it mean to make an “option for the poor”? How do you do this in your daily life? What more can you do to fulfill this precept? Should governmental programs do this as well?**

Of the Obligation of Christians to perform the duty of Charity to the poor.

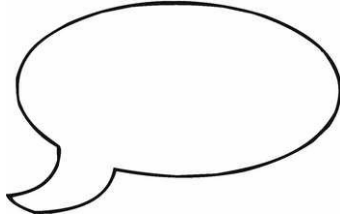
This duty is absolutely commanded, and much insisted on in the word of God. Where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more preemptory urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor?... It is mentioned in the scripture, not only as a duty, but a great duty, to be kind to the needy; but by many it seems not to be looked upon as a duty of great importance. However it is mentioned in scripture as one of the greater and more essential duties of religion...

It is not only very positively and frequently insisted on by God, but it is most reasonable in itself... It is most reasonable, considering the general state and nature of mankind. This is such as renders it most reasonable that we should love our neighbor as ourselves; for men are made in the image of our God, and on this account are worthy of our love... God hath made us with such a nature, that we cannot subsist without the help of one another...

It is especially reasonable, considering our circumstances, under such a dispensation of grace as that of the gospel. Consider how much God hath done for us, how greatly he hath loved us, when we were so unworthy, and when he could have no addition to his happiness by us... what a poor business will it be, that those who hope to share these benefits, yet cannot give something for the relief of a poor neighbour without grudging! that it should grieve them to part with a small matter, to help a fellow-servant in calamity, when Christ did not grudge to shed his holy blood for them! How unsuitable is it for us, who live only by kindness, to be unkind!

(Jonathan Edwards.¹ “Obligations to Charity.” Christian Social Teaching Ed. George W. Forell. Anchor Books.)

¹ Jonathan Edwards was one of the most important American theologians and philosophers of the 18th century. His works have had a strong impact on shaping the American mind and affecting the character of American Christianity, especially when it comes to his formulation of Christian charity.



Discussion:

1. According to Edwards, what is the difference between the importance placed on giving to the poor in scriptures and the value actually placed on it by society? Do you agree with this assessment? If so, how can it be changed?

2. Other than the obligation placed on us by scriptures, what are the two reasons Edwards notes for giving to the poor? What are the implications of these statements for how we view our material possessions?

The following text is from Maimonides' Code, "Laws Concerning Gifts to the Poor," Chapter 10, sections 7-14

There are eight levels of charity [*tzedakah*], one higher than the other. The highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of a person who assists a poor Jew by providing him with a gift or loan, or by accepting him into business partnership, or by helping him find employment – in a word, putting him where he can dispense with other people's aid [For it is said, "You shall strengthen the stranger and the dweller in your midst and live with him," Leviticus 25:35; that is to say, strengthen him until he needs no longer fall upon the mercy of the community or be in need.]

A step below this stands the person who gives *alms* to the needy in such manner that the giver knows not to whom he gives and the recipient knows not from whom it is that he takes...

The rank next to this is of him who drops money in the charity box (one who knows to whom he gives, but the recipient does not know his benefactor)...

A step lower is that in which the poor person knows from whom he is taking but the giver knows not to whom he is giving. Examples of this were the great sages who would tie their coins in their scarves which they would fling over their shoulders so that the poor might help themselves without suffering shame.

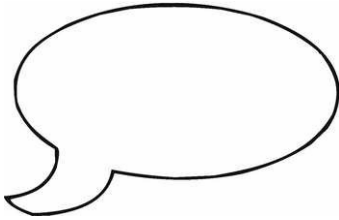
The next degree lower is that of him who, with his own hand, bestows a gift before the poor person asks.

The next degree lower is that of him who gives only after the poor person asks.

The next degree lower is that of him who gives less than is fitting but gives [willingly].

The next degree lower is that of him who gives [unwillingly].

(Francine Klagsbrun, Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living. Jonathan David Publishers, Inc.)



Discussion:

1. **Do you think it is better to give willingly or unwillingly? Before being asked or after being asked? Should these factors matter as long as the donation is helping someone? Why or why not? What are the implications, then, for how we view state-sponsored programs that use tax money to help the poor?**

2. **Why does Maimonides place such a high value on anonymity? Why is it important that the recipient of charity not know his or her benefactor? Why is it better that the benefactor not know the recipients of his or her charity?**

3. **The highest level of *tzedakah*, giving someone a job, is not usually thought of as an act of charity. Why do you think it was included in the list? How does its inclusion change your concept of charity? Do you think it should be included? Why or why not?**

A CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH JOINT COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

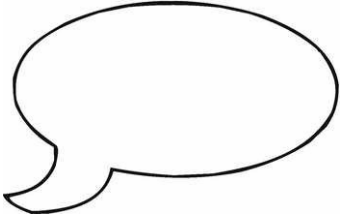
Our joint commitment to justice is deeply rooted in both our faiths. We recall the tradition of helping the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger in our midst in accordance with God's injunction (Ex. 22:20-22; Mt 25:31-46). The Sages of Israel developed a broad doctrine of justice and charity for all, based upon an elevated understanding of the concept of *Tzedeq*. Building on the Church's tradition, Pope John Paul II, in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), reminded Christians that a true relationship with God requires a strong commitment to service of one's neighbor.

While God created human beings in their diversity, He endowed them with the same dignity. We share the conviction that every person has the right to be treated with justice and equality. This right includes an equitable sharing of God's bounty and graciousness (*chesed*).

Given the global dimensions of poverty, injustice and discrimination, we have a clear religious obligation to show concern for the poor and those deprived of their political, social and cultural rights. Jesus, deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of his day, made a commitment to the poor a priority of his ministry. The Talmud affirms that the Holy One, Blessed be God, always cares for the needy. Today, this concern for the poor must embrace the vast numbers on all continents of the hungry, the homeless, the orphan, victims of AIDS, those without adequate medical care and all those who at present lack hope for a better future. In Jewish tradition, the highest form of charity is removing the obstacles that prevent the poor from rising out of their poverty. In recent years, the Church has emphasized its preferential option for the poor. Jews and Christians have an equal obligation to work for justice with

charity (*Tzedakah*) which ultimately will lead to *Shalom* for all humanity. In fidelity to our distinct religious traditions, we see this common commitment to justice and charity as man's cooperation in the Divine plan to bring about a better world.

(International Catholic - Jewish Liaison Committee, "Joint Declaration." July 2004)



Discussion:

1. How are the Jewish and Christian commitments to justice similar? How are they different?
2. How can our joint commitment to justice lead to action?

ACTIVITY: ADDRESSING POVERTY ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

While giving to charity will help the conditions of those living in poverty for the short term, it is only through changing public policy that real changes can take place. Take some time to write or call your members of Congress asking them to ensure their continued support of legislation that will benefit America's needy. For up-to-date information on current legislation, go to the Religious Action Center issue page on poverty at <http://rac.org/advocacy/issues/issueej/> or the National Council of Churches Public Witness Resources page at <http://www.nccusa.org/publicwitness/index.html>.

To learn more:



Mishel, Lawrence, et. al. *The State of Working America 2004/2005*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Bane, Mary Jo and Lawrence M. Mead. *Lifting Up the Poor: A Dialogue on Religion, Poverty, & Welfare Reform*. Washington, D.C. Brookings Institution Press, 2003.

Hunger No More: <http://www.hungernomore.org>

Bread for the World: <http://www.bread.org>

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger: <http://www.mazon.org>

SESSION 2: ENVIRONMENT

The environmental crisis is a religious challenge. As heirs to a tradition of stewardship that goes back to Genesis and that teaches us to be partners in the ongoing work of Creation, we, as Christians and Jews, cannot simply accept the escalating destruction of our environment and its effect on human health and livelihood. Where we are despoiling our air, land, and water, it is our sacred duty to acknowledge our God-given responsibility and take action to alleviate environmental degradation and the pain and suffering that it causes. We must reaffirm and bequeath the tradition we have inherited which calls upon us to safeguard humanity's home.

Time schedule for one session:

0:00-0:05 Overview of session

0:05-0:25 Christianity and the Environment – groups of 4-5

0:25-0:45 Judaism and the Environment – groups of 4-5

0:45-1:00 Watch movie clip and discuss (choose 2 of the 4 questions)

1:00-1:15 Other Religious Beliefs on Caring for the Earth – read aloud and discuss

1:15-1:30 Activity: How You Can Help the Environment

Time schedule for two sessions:

Week 1

0:00-0:05 Overview of session

0:05-0:20 Christianity and the Environment – groups of 4-5

0:20-0:40 Group discussion of previous text

0:40-0:55 Judaism and the Environment – groups of 4-5

0:55-1:15 Group discussion of previous text

Week 2

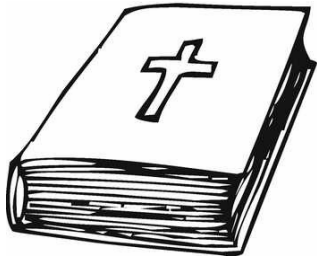
0:00-0:10 Review of previous week's discussion

0:10-0:35 Watch movie clip and discuss

0:35-0:55 Other Religious Beliefs on Caring for the Earth – read aloud and discuss

0:55-1:15 Activity: How You Can Help the Environment

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



The following passage offers a Christian reflection on the connection between one's faith and caring for the Earth.

I am an environmentalist because I am a Christian. I am motivated by my Christian faith. As a follower of Jesus, I take seriously the Holy Scriptures to guide me in all aspects of my life. This includes those Scriptures that instruct us to care for God's good earth -- to care about every present-day environmental issue.

I recognize the natural world as God's creative work. I understand that God's creation is good (Genesis 1:31). I, along with all other people, am instructed to care for and tend the creation for God, to be a steward, a co-creator with God (Genesis 2:15). God owns the earth and everything in it (Psalm 24:1). We are to use the earth and its wondrous resources for living responsibly--to preserve it for the generations to come. We are to enhance the earth for the glory of its Creator.

The good creation, now tainted by human evil and sin, will one day be fully restored. The acceptance of Christ and His salvation -- the coming of the new kingdom -- allows Christians to begin that restoration. In fact, Christians are obligated to begin the restoration of the natural world now (Romans 8:21).

Jesus, the one through whom salvation is attained, was involved in the creation of the earth, along with God and the Holy Spirit. And Jesus will be involved in the full restoration of the earth. Just how this will be done, no one really knows. But it is clear that humans have an important responsibility to maintain the creation for all people and other living things until He comes again.

As a Christian, I need to show my reverence and love for the Trinity by obeying the commandments to my fullest understanding. These commandments include the natural laws of the universe. As I remember and conform to these natural laws (which are really God's laws) I will be a genuine environmentalist...

The primary reason that our earth is so environmentally degraded today is that many of us have not really believed that the natural world is that important. We have apparently been able to circumvent some of nature's laws temporarily in order to satisfy our material excesses. By doing so, we have in reality brought about an environmental crisis that nearly everyone is beginning to recognize. A catastrophic environmental debt has accumulated through years of neglect. If life on earth is to survive, it must be painfully repaid.

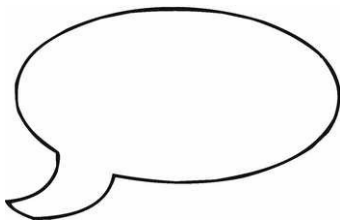
It is possible for those who do not call themselves Christians to work diligently for the saving of the earth. They need our support.

Without a basis in religious faith, however, their understanding of the environmental crisis is incomplete and they are likely to become disillusioned and discouraged after a time.

It is also possible to call oneself a Christian and neglect necessary action on environmental problems. Some Christians historically have come to spiritualize their faith to the point that they have not considered ecology important. A genuine Christian environmentalist will recognize that tending and revering the creation is part of God's divine plan for God's people.

Thus I am not an environmentalist primarily for humanitarian reasons, for economic prosperity, for momentary popularity, for political advantage or for aesthetics. I am an environmentalist because I am a Christian.

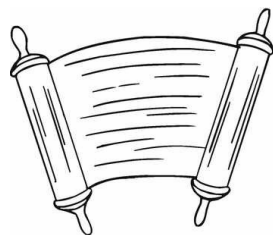
(Art Myer. *Why I am an Environmentalist*. Christianity and the Environment: A Collection of Writings. Mennonite Central Committee.)



Discussion:

1. How can we act as "co-creators" with God? How can we begin the process of "restoration?"
2. How do we treat things that we ourselves have physically created and what does this show us about how we must treat the world, which according to Christian tradition we "co-created" with God?
3. This passage comments on how by only caring for our "material excesses" we have created an environmental crisis. How can we create a balance between taking what we need from the earth to fulfill our needs while still taking care of it so that it will be here for future generations?
4. How does a Christian understanding of the earth allow for a more complete understanding of how to care for the environment?

JUDAISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Just as the previous passage shows the strong connection between faith and the environment for Christians, the following text explores the theological underpinnings of environmental concern for Jews.

Tu B'shvat is the Jewish holiday commonly known as the new year of the trees. It is a holiday that focuses on nature and the earth itself, and our

relationship to the natural world.² According to Jewish tradition, the Earth is the Eternal's and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants (Psalms 24:1). Human beings cannot own land completely; the land also belongs to its Creator: The land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me (Leviticus 25:23).

We are stewards of the land, and therefore stewards of the land's produce. Each farmer is responsible for giving to the poor and the priestly class what the Creator has declared theirs. How different this is from modern understandings of land and produce. In contemporary society, we buy and sell land and the goods and commodities we believe that we own. The Hebrew language itself instructs us otherwise.

All Hebrew words which are commonly used to express ownership in reality only express the notion of possession. Phrases like yesh li ["I have" or "mine"], or shayach li ["belonging to me"], or even ba'al ["owner"], do not convey the sense of absolute ownership, but of possessory or other complex relationships. The language here is the handmaiden of theology; we cannot speak of human "ownership," because our theology does not believe that there is rightfully any such notion. God is the "owner" of all, and we humans have simply possession rights... [Rabbi Saul Berman, To Till and To Tend: A Guide to Jewish Environmental Study and Action]

Jewish principles of caring for land and Creation emerge from this core theological principle. We must care for land that we may possess – stewarding it, and apportioning the gifts of Creation that we receive from it according to our tradition's principles of justice.

The very first passages of the Torah outline our role as caretakers of the Earth. In the first account of the Creation of the world, God commands humanity "to fill the Earth and master it," teaching that the world is given to us to master for our benefit.

Yet the first chapter of Genesis also stresses that the created world, and all that fills it – the land and the seas, the trees and grass, the sun, moon, and stars, fish and birds, creeping things and land animals-are good. God also blesses the birds and fish to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:22). Human beings are unique, yet also part of the created world: a creature among creatures, one part of the good Creation.

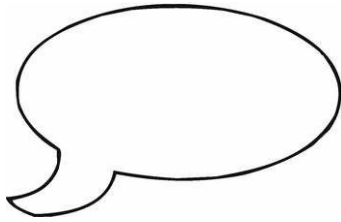
Our role as caretakers of Creation is stated explicitly in the next chapter, where we read:

The Eternal God formed a human (adam) from the dust of the Earth (adamah). God blew into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being... The Eternal God took and placed the human being in the Garden of Eden, to till it and to tend it. (Gen. 2:7, 2:15)

² This is actually a later understanding of *Tu B'Shvat*. Originally, it was the new year for the purpose of calculating the age of trees for tithing. Leviticus 19 states that fruit from trees may not be eaten during the first three years; the fourth year's fruit is for God, and after that, you can eat the fruit. Each tree is considered to have aged one year as of *Tu B'Shvat*.

Genesis chapter 2 thus teaches us that we are created from the Earth, and that we are to serve as its guardians. The Creation narratives demonstrate the complexity of our relationship to the Earth and its creatures. We are commanded to use the Earth to fulfill our human needs; *and* we are commanded to protect God's Creation. Simply put, Genesis instructs us to meet our human needs and fulfill our human potential in ways that do not deplete and degrade Creation, but rather allow all life to flourish.

(Rabbi Alan Berlin, "Tu B'Shvat and the Environment." Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life)



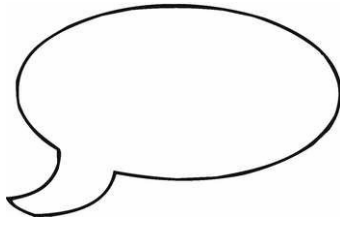
Discussion:

1. How does the Jewish concept of land ownership differ from the notion of ownership generally used in our society? What are the implications of this concept for how we treat our possessions, especially the Earth?
2. Does this understanding of ownership have an influence on your treatment of the earth? What are some things you can change about how you treat the Earth that would reflect this value?
3. How are humans different from the rest of creation? How are we the same? How might the way we think about our role in creation influence how we treat the rest of creation?
4. What is the significance of having a holiday celebrating the new year for trees (*Tu B'Shvat*)? Do you think it is necessary? Why or why not?
5. Is there a difference between being a "co-creator" and a "caretaker?" Are there different responsibilities and obligations involved in each?

MOVIE CLIP: OUR ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE



From a religious perspective we can easily agree that we must take care of the Earth which was given to us by God. With modern day technology, however, we are often disconnected from the nature we seek to protect. Watch the movie clip from Pocahontas (37:48-42:40). The scene raises questions about our connection to nature and how we are affected by modernization.



Discussion:

1. John Smith wants to teach Pocahontas how to use the land properly and make the most of it. In his opinion this involves building roads, buildings, and decent housing. **In your opinion, what is the best way to use the land? Is there a balance between using the land to fulfill our needs while also maintaining its natural state?**
2. Pocahontas sings “You think you own whatever land you land on, the Earth is just a dead thing you can claim...” **How do you think about the land that we walk on and use everyday? Is it something you simply own or, like Pocahontas, is it a living being? How does this view affect how you treat it? How might you behave differently toward the Earth if you thought of it as Pocahontas does?**
3. **As a society, are we disconnected from nature? If so, how might we return to a focus on nature? What benefits will this return have? What drawbacks? What knowledge do we lose at the expense of technology? Are our gains worth what we lose?**
4. Pocahontas suggests to John Smith, “Roll in all the riches all around you; And for once, never wonder what they’re worth.” **Do we treat the land as if it is simply a profitable commodity that we can use for ourselves without caring for how it is affected? How so? What are the implications of this view for the future of our environment?**

ADDITIONAL RELIGIOUS VIEWS ON CARING FOR THE EARTH

The following quotes from various religious leaders raise further questions about our interaction with the environment.

Yea, “Do not destroy anything” is the first and most general call of God...If you should regard the beings beneath you as objects without rights, not perceiving God who created them, and therefore desire that they feel the might of your presumptuous mood, instead of using them only as the means of wise human activity – then God’s call proclaims to you, “Do not destroy anything! Be a *mentsh*!³ Only if you use the things around you for wise human purposes, sanctified by the word of my teaching, only then are you a *mentsh* and have the right over them that I have given you as a human. However, if you destroy, if you ruin, at that moment you are not human but an animal and have no right to do the things around you. I lent them to you for wise use only; never forget that I lent them to you”

(Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch⁴)

On what condition are we allowed to use the resources of the Earth for our own purposes? Does the way in which we treat the Earth today follow these conditions?

³ *Mentsh* is Yiddish word of German origin meaning “a real human being”

⁴ 19th century German rabbi who sought to combine both Torah and secular society in developing today’s Orthodox Judaism

I believe in my heart that faith in Jesus Christ can and will lead us beyond an exclusive concern for the well-being of other human beings to the broader concern for the well-being of the birds in our backyards, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth."

(John Wesley⁵ God's Covenant with Animals.)

What is our obligation as people of faith to have concern not just for humans, but for animals as well? How should we prioritize such concerns?

"The earth we inherit is in danger; the skies and the seas, the forests and the rivers, the soil and the air, are in peril. And with them humankind itself is threatened. As earth's fullness has been our blessing, so its pollution now becomes our curse. As the wonder of nature's integrity has been our delight, so the horror of nature's disintegration now becomes our sorrow."

(Rabbi Alexander Schindler⁶)

How are humankind and the Earth intertwined? How does the dangerous position of one hurt the other?

The Earth is ultimately *a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all*. . . It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of existence. Today the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness – both individual and collective – are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence.

(Pope John Paul II "*The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*")

How is the Earth a "common heritage"? What does this concept teach us about how we should treat the environment?

Small is the world that most of us pay attention to, and limited is our concern. What do we see when we see the world? There are three aspects of nature that command our attention: its power, its beauty, and its grandeur. Accordingly, there are three ways in which we may relate ourselves to the world – we may exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it in awe."

(Rabbi Abraham Heschel⁷)

Which of these three ways to relate to the world – exploitation, enjoyment, or acceptance in awe – is ideal? Is there a fourth alternative that you would prefer?

⁵ 18th century Anglican clergyman and Christian theologian who was an early leader in the Methodist movement

⁶ President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now Union for Reform Judaism), 1973-1996

⁷ Significant Jewish theologian of the 20th century especially known for his involvement in social activism

“If we are ever able to stop destroying our environment, it will be because person by person we decide, by God’s grace, to turn aside from greed and materialism. It will be because we learn that joy and fulfillment come through right relationship with God, neighbor and earth, not an ever escalating demand for more and more material consumption. Nowhere is that more possible than in local congregations that combine prayer and action, worship and analysis, deep personal love for the Creator and for the Creator’s garden.”

(Dr. Ronald Sider⁸)

Do greed and materialism hurt the environment as indicated here? How so? What is an alternate path we can take to avoid such destructive behavior?

“Our responsibility for all that dwells in the earth and for the earth itself extends into the future. The earth is not ours to destroy (cf. Dt 20:19), but to hand on in trust to future generations. We cannot, therefore, recklessly consume its resources to satisfy needs that are artificially created and sustained by a society that tends to live only for the present. We also need to act, together whenever feasible, to assure that sound practices, guaranteed by law, are established in our countries and local communities for the future preservation of the environment... Respect for God’s creation, of which we are a part, must become a way of life.

(International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, “A Common Declaration on the Environment.” March 1998.)

What is our environmental responsibility to future generations? How can we act on this responsibility?

ACTIVITY: HOW YOU CAN HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

“The adoption of statements on the environment by church councils and assemblies is important. But unless every local congregation actually carries out sound environmental practices in its buildings and in the homes of the members, these statements are worthless. Care of the earth—our mandate from the Creator—is the responsibility of us all.”

(The Reverend Dr. Herbert W. Chilstrom⁹)

As described by Reverend Chilstrom, it is not enough to simply make a statement supporting the fair treatment of the environment. As a community of Christians and Jews, we have the religious obligation

⁸ Professor of Theology and Society at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary; Executive Director of Evangelicals for Social Action

⁹ Bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

to protect the Earth. Brainstorm ideas of how you can help the environment and reconnect with nature on a local, national, or international level. Create an action plan to follow thorough with one of these ideas.

One suggestion of a program you may consider is the "Compact Fluorescent Light Bulb Campaign" sponsored by the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. Compact fluorescent light bulbs use 75% less energy than incandescent light bulbs, resulting in less greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and toxic waste. If every U.S. household replaced one bulb with a CFL, it would have the same impact as removing one million cars from the road. For more information go to: http://www.coejl.org/climatechange/cc_cfl.php

****This program can serve as an ongoing project with your synagogue and church to maintain your relationship and build a stronger connection between your members.***



To learn more:

Rockefeller, Steven C. and John N. Elders. Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

Gore, Al. An Inconvenient Truth. Rodale Books, 2006.

The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life: <http://www.coejl.org/>

The North American Coalition for Christianity and Ecology: <http://www.nacce.org/>

Stop Global Warming: <http://www.stopglobalwarming.org>

SESSION 3: WAR AND PEACE

We live in an age where conflict and war pervade society, causing devastation and destruction to many. While some think that acts of war are justified in certain situations, others feel that violence will only lead to more violence and should never be used. What do the Christian and Jewish traditions say about war? Is it acceptable to use war as a means to an end, and if so, when?

The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, signifies more than just the absence of war. The root of the word also denotes completion or perfection. In Judaism, shalom includes well-being, prosperity, and an ideal state of affairs. There is a particularly noticeable distinction between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament on the issue of war and peace. Keep this in mind as you discuss the passages, also noting that for Christians this is a particularly relevant issue as they try to reconcile their sources and come to a meaningful understanding of the texts.

Time schedule for one session:

0:00-0:05 Overview of session
0:05-0:25 War and Peace in the Bible – text study in pairs
0:25-0:45 Watch movie clip and discuss (choose 2 of the 5 questions)
0:45-1:05 War in Christianity and Judaism – read passages quietly and discuss together
1:05-1:20 Peacemaking in Christianity and Judaism – groups of 4-5
1:20-1:30 Activity: Prayer for Peace

Time schedule for two sessions:

Week 1

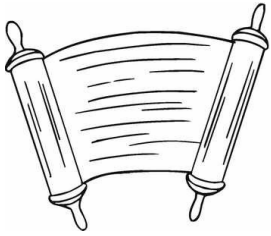
0:00-0:05 Overview of session
0:05-0:20 War and Peace in the Bible – text study in pairs
0:20-0:35 Group discussion of Biblical texts
0:35-0:55 Watch movie clip and discuss
0:55-1:15 War in Christianity and Judaism – read passages quietly and discuss together

Week 2

0:00-0:10 Review of previous week's discussion
0:10-0:20 Peacemaking in Christianity and Judaism – groups of 4-5
0:20-0:40 Group discussion of previous text
0:40-1:00 Responses to War – read aloud and discuss
1:00-1:15 Activity: Prayer for Peace

WAR AND PEACE IN THE BIBLE

These verses from the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament speak to the use of war and violence.



Deuteronomy 20: 5-8: Guidelines of who is allowed to engage in battle

Then [before engaging in battle] the officials shall address the troops, as follows:

“Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it.

“Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never harvested it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it.

“Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet married her? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another marry her.”

The officials shall go on addressing the troops and say, “Is there anyone afraid and disheartened? Let him go back to his home, lest the courage of his comrades flag like his.”

Joshua 8:3, 7-8, 18-27: The Battle of Ai

So Joshua and all the fighting troops prepared for the march on Ai. Joshua chose thirty thousand men, valiant warriors, and sent them ahead by night...you will dash out from your ambush and seize the city, and the Eternal your God will deliver it into your hands. And when you take the city set it on fire. Do as the Eternal has commanded. Mind, I have given you your orders... The Eternal then said to Joshua, “Hold your javelin in your hand toward Ai, for I will deliver it into your hands.” So Joshua held out the javelin in his hand toward the city. As soon as he held out his hand, the ambush came rushing out of their station. They entered the city and captured it; and they swiftly set fire to the city. The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising to the sky; they had no room for flight in any direction. The people who had been fleeing in the wilderness now became the pursuers. For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city, and that the smoke was rising from the city, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai. Now the other [Israelites] were coming out of the city against them, so that they were between two bodies of Israelites, one on each side of them. They were slaughtered, so that no one escaped or got away. The king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua. When Israel had killed all the inhabitants of Ai who has pursued them into the open wilderness, and all of them, to the last man, had fallen by the sword, all the Israelites turned back to Ai and put it to the sword. The total of those who fell that day, men and women, the entire population of Ai, came to twelve thousand. Joshua did not draw back the hand with which he held the javelin until all the inhabitants had been exterminated. However, the Israelites took the cattle and the

spoil of the city as their booty, in accordance with the instructions that the Eternal had given Joshua.

Isaiah 2:4: "Nation shall not take up sword against nation"

Thus God will judge among the nations and arbitrate for the many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: Nation shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war.

I Chronicles 22: 7-8: King David is not allowed to build the Temple

David said to Solomon, "My son, I wanted to build a House for the name of the Lord my God [the First Temple]. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and fought great battles; you shall not build a House for My name for you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight.'"



Matthew 5: 38-39, 43-45: "Eye for an eye"

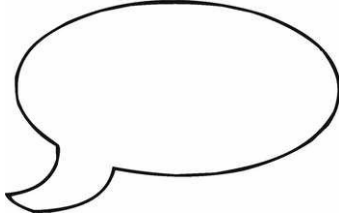
You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also... You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matthew 26:50-52: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword"

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."

James 4:1-3: Causes of fighting and how to prevent it

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.



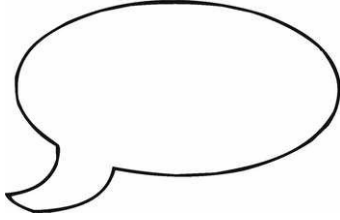
Discussion:

- 1. Why would people be exempted from fighting in battle as prescribed in Deuteronomy? What do these suggestions reveal about the Bible's attitude toward war?**
- 2. How can you reconcile the passage from Joshua where God plays an active role in the defeat of another people with the passages where war is portrayed as morally questionable and even completely wrong? Are some wars just and others unjust? How would the Bible define a just or an unjust war?**
- 3. The passage from I Chronicles seems to condemn war by not allowing David to build the Temple because of his connections to bloodshed. If David's actions were really wrong, why was his "punishment" not greater? Should he not be held accountable for the people who were killed in battle? How does this change your understanding of war being either entirely right or wrong? Is there a middle ground for war that is allowed but not needed? Why or why not?**
- 4. How do the passages from Isaiah and Matthew view war and violence? How are these views different from the approach in the previous passages? Are these views on war contradictory? If so, how would you reconcile them? Is there a balance between the complete valorization of pacifism and engaging in wanton destruction?**
- 5. Discuss the cause of fighting and how it can be prevented, according to the passage from James. Do you agree with this description? Why or why not?**

MOVIE CLIP: THE VALUE OF LIFE IN WAR



War raises many questions about the value of the life of each individual soldier. While death is an inescapable part of war, measures can be taken which either limit or increase the number of casualties. Watch the scene from Saving Private Ryan (43:03-45:44). In this clip, the soldiers shown are on a special mission to find a particular soldier. In listening to their conversation, think about the value they place on the life of each soldier.



Discussion:

1. The soldiers shown are on a mission to find and send home one soldier whose four brothers were all killed in battle. On their way, they discuss the question of risking all eight of their lives to save this one. **In this situation, is the risk of more lives worth saving the one? What values should be taken into consideration to begin this analysis?**
2. **In light of the previous question, is a war worth fighting if it has the potential to save more lives in the future? How many lives are worth risking to save others? How should it be determined whose lives are risked and whose are saved?**
3. When the soldiers complain about the mission and the fact that they all have mothers at home, the captain responds saying, "The mission supersedes everyone's mother." **Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Should we be more concerned with each individual's life or fighting for the greater good, such as stopping Hitler, as one of the soldiers mentions?**
4. One of the soldiers refers to God's gift in creating him as a "fine instrument of warfare." **Do you agree with this assessment that God created humans to engage in war? If so, what are the implications of this belief on the value of each person's life? If not, how can you justify wars in which people are used in this way?**
5. On this mission, the soldiers are fighting to save rather than to kill. **Does this make their mission more moral? Does it justify the lives that may be lost along the way?**

WAR IN CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

The following two passages explore just-war theory in the Christian tradition.

The just war theory is a largely Christian philosophy that attempts to reconcile three things:

- 1) Taking human life is seriously wrong;
- 2) States have a duty to defend their citizens, and defend justice; and
- 3) Protecting innocent human life and defending important moral values sometimes requires willingness to use force and violence.

A war is only a Just War if it is both justified (*Jus ad Bellum*), and carried out in the right way (*Jus in Bello*). Some wars fought for noble causes have been rendered unjust because of the way in which they were fought.

The criterion of just cause classically and explicitly included one or more of three possibilities:

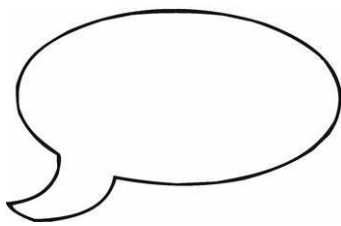
- 1) Defense against wrongful attack,
- 2) Retaking something wrongly taken,
- 3) Or punishment of evil.

(Dr. Jerome Dominguez. The "Just War Theory." The Jerome Bible Commentary.
<http://biblia.com/jesusbible/joshua3c.htm>)

In essence [the just-war] tradition represents the effort of successive generations of Christian thinkers, from Augustine on, to define the circumstances under which a Christian can properly approve of war. The immediate impression created by this way of thinking (and by the nomenclature of “just” war) is that it is a militant, nonpacifist viewpoint. Indeed, for Christians to accept the notion that any war *could* be justified represented a major shift from the predominantly pacifist stand of much of the pre-Constantinian church. Nevertheless, as stated by Augustine and as refined by later Catholic thinkers, the just-war tradition was based upon a strong Christian presumption *against* war. It could almost be termed a crypto-pacifist position. Just-war doctrine has said, in effect, that only under certain exceptional conditions (specified and refined by thinkers dealing with the problem) could a Christian approve war. Peace, on the other hand, is to be regarded as normal. The burden of proof must be borne by every particular war. In case of continuing doubt as to whether a war is justified, the Christian must withhold approval and participation...

Augustine, for example did regard slavery and war as being consistent with the gospel except in the sense that they are a necessary remedy for the effects of the human fall into sin. Augustine’s discussion of the just war clearly recognizes that war is a tragic evil, to be avoided if at all possible. But, in the light of the fall, he also considers it a sometime necessity if even greater evils are to be prevented. As a last resort, a Christian ruler can go to war to protect the commonwealth from aggression. Subsequent Christian thinkers, including Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and many others, have also contributed to this line of thinking.

(J. Philip Wogaman, Christian Moral Judgment. Westminster/John Knox Press)



Discussion:

1. Do you agree with the statement that some wars which may be fought for a just cause can become unjust because of the way they are fought? Why or why not? What are some of the practices that may render such a war unjust? To whom does it matter?

2. How did Christianity come to formulate a just-war tradition? From what values did it arise? What are the implications for how a Christian understands war?

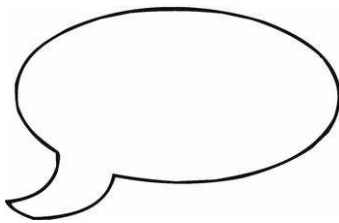
Judaism also provides guidelines for when a war is acceptable and when it is not.

Golda Meir¹⁰ once said: “A leader who doesn’t stutter before he sends his nation into battle is not fit to be a leader.” The sages would have approved of that comment.... Their attitude toward war was mixed. They found war distasteful, even shameful; yet they accepted the idea that there are times when it is necessary. Using Biblical accounts of battles fought by the Israelites, they

¹⁰ Golda Meir (1898-1978) was born in Kiev. She moved to America as a child and then in 1921 moved to the British Mandate Palestine. She eventually became Israel’s first female Prime Minister, serving during the 1973 War.

divided wars into two broad categories: mandatory and optional. Mandatory wars are wars of self-defense or of clear-cut moral necessity. Optional wars are wars fought for expansion, or preventively, to stop an enemy who is preparing for attack. Said the scholars, "The wars waged by Joshua to conquer Canaan were mandatory in the opinion of all [because commanded by God]; the wars waged by the House of David for territorial expansion were optional in the opinion of all." Most wars, they felt, were optional, and they ruled that such wars could not be declared by a king without the approval of the Sanhedrin (Jewish high court). These wars, also, were subject to many restrictions.

(Francine Klagsbrun, Voices of Wisdom: Jewish Ideals and Ethics for Everyday Living. Jonathan David Publishers, Inc.)



Discussion:

1. Do you agree or disagree with Golda Meir's comment? Is it a leader's responsibility to hesitate before going to war? Is this an important quality in a leader? Why or why not?

2. Do you accept the idea that sometimes wars are necessary? In what situations do you think war is justified? In what situations do you think it should be allowed but not mandated? Do you agree or disagree with the opinions of the Jewish sages?

3. In categorizing mandatory and optional wars, there is a further distinction made between preemptive wars and preventive wars. The following excerpt from a Central Conference of American Rabbis responsa (Rabbinic guidance based on Jewish sources addressing a particular question) explains further.

We want to distinguish between *preventive* war and a *preemptive* military strike.... A preemptive strike, as we use the term, is one launched against an enemy that has mobilized or is engaged in obvious and active preparation for war... the preventive war [is one which is] initiated against a nation that may plausibly pose a threat to us in the future, even though it poses no immediate or near-term threat and is not currently planning to attack us or, for that matter, any other nation...

It is clear that the Sages do not view preventive war as an instance of "commanded" war. Maimonides rules accordingly... While a war fought in direct self-defense is clearly necessary and therefore "commanded," a war initiated against a nation that *might* attack some day does not fall into this category. It is a "discretionary" war, a war that the Torah grudgingly allows the king to fight, but a war that, in the context of the history of our time, cannot be justified on moral grounds.

(CCAR Responsa 5762.8, *Preventive War*. <http://data.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=8&year=5762>)

Do you think this is a fair categorization? Why or why not?

5. According to Jewish tradition, some wars are mandatory because they are commanded by God (as in Joshua's wars to conquer Canaan). **Do you think God commands war today? If so, what are the implications for society?**

PEACEMAKING IN CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM

The following text by Dorothy Day, a 20th century social activist and devout Catholic, was written a month after Pearl Harbor.

Lord God, merciful God, our Father, shall we keep silent, or shall we speak? And if we speak, what shall we say?...

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, who makes His sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and unjust."

We are at war, a declared war, with Japan, Germany and Italy. But still we can repeat Christ's words, each day, holding them close in our hearts... We are still pacifists. Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers. Speaking for many of our conscientious objectors, we will not participate in armed warfare or in making munitions, or by buying government bonds to prosecute the war, or in urging others to these efforts.

But neither will we be carping in our criticism. We love our country and we love our President. We have been the only country in the world where men of all nations have taken refuge from oppression. We recognize that while in the order of intention we have tried to stand for peace, for love of our brother, in the order of execution we have failed as Americans in living up to our principles.

We will try daily, hourly, to pray for an end to the war, such an end, to quote Father Orchard, "as would manifest to all the world, that it was brought about by divine action, rather than by military might or diplomatic negotiation, which men and nations would then only attribute to their power or sagacity..."

(Dorothy Day, "Our Country Passes from Undeclared War to Declared War; We Continue our Christian Pacifist Stand." *The Catholic Worker*.)

The follow passage by Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the most significant Jewish theologians of the 20th century, was first published in February 1944.

There have never been so much guilt and distress, agony and terror. At no time has the earth been so soaked with blood. Fellow men turned out to be evil ghosts, monstrous and weird. Ashamed and dismayed, we ask: Who is responsible?...

We have failed to fight for right, for justice, for goodness; as a result we must fight against wrong, against injustice, against evil. We have failed to offer sacrifices on the altar of peace; now we must offer sacrifices on the altar of war. A tale is told of a band of inexperienced mountain climbers. Without guides, they struck recklessly into the

wilderness. Suddenly a rocky ledge gave way beneath their feet and they were tumbled headlong into a dismal pit. In the darkness of the pit they recovered from their shock, only to find themselves set upon by a swarm of angry snakes. Every crevice became alive with fanged, hissing things. For each snake the desperate men slew, ten more seemed to lash out in its place. Strangely enough, one man seemed to stand aside from the fight. When the indignant voices of his struggling companions reproached him for not fighting, he called back: If we remain here, we shall be dead before the snakes. I am searching for a way of escape from the pit for all of us...

Tanks and planes cannot redeem humanity. A man with a gun is like a beast without a gun. The killing of snakes will save us for the moment but not forever. The war will outlast the victory of arms if we fail to conquer the infamy of the soul: the indifference to crime, when committed against others. For evil is indivisible. It is the same in thought and in speech, in private and in social life. The greatest task of our time is to take the souls of men out of the pit. The world has experienced that God is involved. Let us forever remember that the sense for the sacred is as vital to us as the light of the sun...

God will return to us when we are willing to let Him into our banks and factories, into our Congress and clubs, into our homes and theaters... Only in His presence shall we learn that the glory of man is not in his will to power but in his power of compassion. Man reflects either the image of His presence or that of a beast...

There is a divine dream which the prophets and rabbis have cherished and which fills our prayers and permeates the acts of Jewish piety. It is the dream of a world, rid of evil by the efforts of man, by his will to serve what goes beyond his own interests. God is waiting for us to redeem the world.

(Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Meaning of This War." *Liberal Judaism*.)

The following message was issued by a Quaker Yearly Meeting in London in 1943.

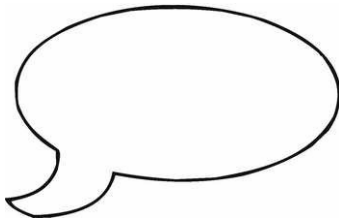
All thoughtful men and women are torn at heart by the present situation. The savage momentum of war drags us all in its wake. We desire a righteous peace. Yet to attain peace it is claimed that, as Chungking, Rotterdam and Coventry were devastated, so the Eder and Moehne dams must be destroyed and whole districts of Hamburg obliterated. The people of Milan and Turin demonstrate for peace but the bombing continues. War is hardening our hearts. To preserve our sanity, we become apathetic. In such an atmosphere no true peace can be framed; yet before us we see months of increasing terror. Can those who pay heed to moral laws, can those who follow Christ submit to the plea that the only way is that demanded by military necessity? True peace involves freedom from tyranny and a generous tolerance; conditions that are denied over a large part of Europe and are not fulfilled in other parts of the world. But true peace cannot be dictated, it can only be built in co-operation between all peoples. None of us, no nation, no citizen, is free from some responsibility for this situation with its conflicting difficulties. To the world in its confusion Christ came. Through him we know that God

dwells with men and that by turning from evil and living in his spirit we may be led into his way of peace. That way of peace is not to be found in any policy of 'unconditional surrender' by whomsoever demanded. It requires that men and nations should recognise their common brotherhood, using the weapons of integrity, reason, patience and love, never acquiescing in the ways of the oppressor, always ready to suffer with the oppressed. In every country there is a longing for freedom from domination and war which men are striving to express. Now is the time to issue an open invitation to cooperate in creative peacemaking, to declare our willingness to make sacrifices of national prestige, wealth and standards of living for the common good of men.

The way of Christ is followed not by those who would be mighty and powerful, but by those who would serve. His peace for the world will be won by those who follow him in repentance and willingness to forgive.

("Epistle Issued by Yearly Meeting 1943." London Yearly Meeting.

www.quaker.org)



Discussion:

1. How do the ideas reflected in these texts differ from the just war theory and mandatory/optional war categories discussed earlier? How do you reconcile these different values?

2. What do these texts suggest as alternates to war? How can we work to prevent war before it happens as well as once it has begun?

3. Both Dorothy Day and Abraham Heschel mention the role of the divine and sacred in peacemaking. How do you view the role of God in creating a peaceful society? Do you agree with the descriptions given here? Why or why not?

RESPONSES TO WAR

In today's society we must face the reality that wars do exist. In such cases, what should our response be as Jews and Christians? The following texts offer some insights.

[The] "commanded war"... teaches us that our tradition rejects pacifism as a policy of national defense. The Torah does not expect us to submit to armed aggression, to stand silently and passively when others seek to conquer and dominate us... Every nation must possess the right to take up arms if necessary to protect itself and its citizens against military attack...

Although the Torah permits the state to resort to arms, it does not glorify war. Again, the opposite is the case. Peace, and not war, is our primary aspiration; we are commanded to seek peace and pursue it (Psalms 34:15)... Our Biblical history recounts that King David, whose military career offers us the very paradigm for "discretionary

war," was not permitted to build the Temple because "you have shed much blood and fought great battles; you shall not build a House for My name for you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight" (I Chronicles 22:8)... In its abhorrence of bloodshed, the Torah instructs that before undertaking any war, commanded or discretionary, we must reach out to our foes and offer them peace...

It also bears a heavy responsibility for its conduct of the war, no matter how justified that war may be... Even during wartime, we are permitted to kill only in self-defense or in pursuit of legitimate military objectives. We are forbidden to harm a non-combatant population, and we are surely prohibited from striking at women and children who take no part in battle." We know that civilian deaths are inevitable in war, no matter how carefully it is waged. That inevitability, however, does not exempt those who prosecute war from the task of keeping its collateral damage to the absolute minimum.

(CCAR Responsa 5762.8, *Preventive War*. <http://data.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=8&year=5762>)

If Christians are called upon to probe the moral propriety of entering and conducting war by using the seven *jus ad bellum* principles (which concern justification for using force) and two *jus in bello* principles (which applies to conduct in war), should they not also be called upon to monitor the moral propriety of concluding a war through some set of *jus post bellum* principles?...

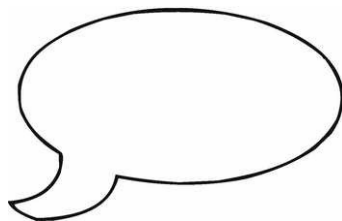
The centerpiece of the *jus post bellum* conditions of a just war would be the principle of repentance. Victors would be expected to conduct themselves humbly after a war. Where public display is called for, victors should show remorse for the price of war paid not only by their comrades but also by the vanquished. Did Augustine not say that even a just war constitutes a mournful occasion? Proscribed by the principle of repentance would be nationalistic, ethnocentric celebrations of victory--celebrations disregarding the profound pain experienced by those on both sides of a conflict. There is a real, though subtle, moral difference between appropriately celebrating the return of sons and daughters from war and celebrating the defeat of one's enemies. Such a distinction may seem marginal, but as the famous Roman Catholic just war theorist John Courtney Murray once said, in morality, margins often make all the difference...

[This principle of repentance] could expand... the moral sensibilities of people who believe that war, while evil, is sometimes necessary for the protection of human life... [It] could serve as a litmus test for the sincerity of the just war claims made before and during the conflict... Would this not establish for subsequent discussions of war a higher moral standard, one that would probe deeper into the victor's actual motives?

The issue of motivation recalls Augustine--the Christian thinker generally identified as the originator of the just war theory... For Augustine, the critical factor in determining the possibility of a person's involvement in war as a Christian is attitude. Improper attitudes, not actions alone, account for the evil of war. Augustine wrote:

What is the evil in war? Is it the death of someone who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is merely cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars

(Michael J. Schuck, When the shooting stops: missing elements in the just war theory. Christian Century.)



Discussion.

1. Discuss how we should behave before, during, and after war, even when this war falls into the category of a "just" or "commanded" war.
2. Do you agree with the notion that how a nation carries out its war also affects its morality? Why or why not?
3. How does the way we respond to war as Americans fit into the criteria set forth in these texts? Are we able to call our wars just by these guidelines or do we need to change our conduct and attitudes?

ACTIVITY: PRAYER FOR PEACE

Although finding solutions to the question of when a war is necessary or just can be difficult, there is still an overall sense that a world in which war does not exist is ideal. As people of faith we can all agree that we should be striving for peaceful relations with our neighbors. Both Christians and Jews pray for peace, as seen in the texts below. In order to share this sentiment and hope for a more peaceful world, draft your own prayer for peace as a group.

A Christian Prayer for Peace

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, and no strength known but the strength of love... We pray thee so mightily to shed and spread abroad thy Spirit, that all peoples and ranks may be gathered under one banner, of the Prince of Peace; as children of one God and Father of all; to whom be dominion and glory now and forever. Amen. (Eric Milner-White, 1884-1964)

A Jewish Prayer for Peace

Grant peace, goodness and blessing, grace, kindness, and mercy, to us and to all Your people Israel. Bless us our Creator, all of us together, through the light of Your Presence. Truly through the light of Your Presence, Adonai our God, You gave us a Torah of life – the love of kindness, justice and blessing, mercy, life, and peace. May You see fit to bless

Your people Israel, at all times, at every hour, with Your peace. Praised are You Adonai, who blesses Your people Israel with peace. (*Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*)



To learn more:

Wogaman, J. Philip, Christian Moral Judgment. Louisville, KY: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1976.

Goldberg, Edwin C. Swords and Plowshares: Jewish Views of War And Peace. New York: URJ Press, 2006.

Bainton, Roland H. Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979.

The United States Institute of Peace: <http://www.usip.org/library/topics/rp.html>

SESSION 4: DEATH PENALTY

The death penalty, outlawed in most of Europe, Canada, Australia, and a majority of countries in the world, is still practiced in almost 40 U.S. states. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, as of January 1, 2005 there were 3,455 people on death row in the United States. Between 1976 and September of 2004, 943 people were executed. Thirteen states currently allow the execution of those who committed crimes as juveniles. What do the Jewish and Christian traditions have to say about the issue and how should these viewpoints influence the use of the death penalty in our country?

Time schedule for one session:

0:00-0:05 Overview of session
0:05-0:20 A Biblical View of the Death Penalty – read aloud and discuss
0:20-0:35 The Death Penalty in Jewish Thought – groups of 4-5
0:35-0:55 The Death Penalty in Christian Thought – groups of 4-5
0:55-1:15 Watch movie clip and discuss (choose 2 of the 6 questions)
1:15-1:30 Activity: Case Studies

Time schedule for two sessions:

Week 1

0:00-0:05 Overview of session
0:05-0:20 A Biblical View of the Death Penalty – text study in pairs
0:20-0:35 Group discussion of Biblical texts
0:35-0:55 Understanding the Biblical Text – read aloud and discuss
0:55-1:15 The Death Penalty in Jewish Thought – read aloud and discuss

Week 2

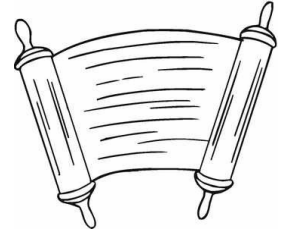
0:00-0:10 Review of previous week's discussion
0:10-0:25 The Death Penalty in Christian Thought – two groups, each discusses one text
0:25-0:35 Each group shares the main points from their text with the larger group and discusses
0:35-0:55 Watch movie clip and discuss
0:55-1:15 Activity: Case Studies

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE DEATH PENALTY

These verses from the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament traditionally are used to justify the death penalty:

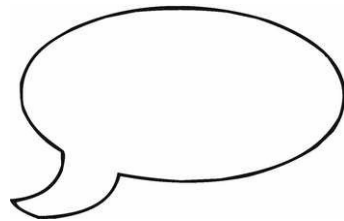
Genesis 9:3-6

Any small animal that is alive shall be food for you, like green grasses – I give you [them] all. But flesh whose lifeblood is [still] in it you may not eat. Moreover, for your own bloodguilt I will require your lives; I will require it by means of beast or by means of human beings – by means of a fellow human being will I require a [guilty] person’s life. The shedder of human blood, that person’s blood shall be shed by [another] human; for human beings were made in the image of God.



Romans 13:1-7

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is not authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.



Discussion:

- 1. What do these passages suggest about society’s role in administering punishment for the crimes people have committed?**
- 2. Do these same messages apply today? How might these verses be better understood within the context of the time in which they were written?**

In the history of Christian theological legitimation of the death penalty, Genesis 9:6 has probably been cited more frequently than any other text as basic proof of the propriety of humans executing human malefactors. For centuries it was taken as divine command, promulgated in the Covenant with Noah, imposing the death penalty on murderers; the conclusion was drawn in literalist interpretation that the Bible here places upon the state the solemn duty to execute all persons duly convicted of murder and that the failure to do so would be an abominable act of disobedience. Such a reading was always faced with manifold difficulties, including the problem of explaining why, five chapters earlier, the primeval murderer did not have his blood shed, but rather “the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who came upon him should kill him (Gn 4:15). But there were various ways to get around the objection, such as by contending that, while murder was always wrong, God did not impose the death penalty until after the Flood.

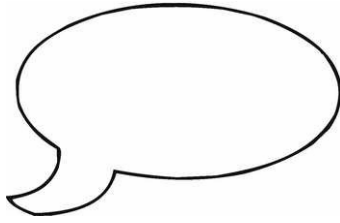
Another objection provoked by a critical reading of this verse is the fact that “no distinction is made between accidental, negligent, and willful homicide; and within willful homicide no distinction is made between crimes of passion and those which are planned with scheming malice.” Those who appeal to it as their authority for blanket approval of the death penalty invariably narrow its application without further ado to the single case of first-degree murder. This kind of arbitrary restriction, devoid of any textual basis, is a good example of why such proof-texting has been thoroughly discredited.

Modern scholars have pointed out that the text actually has a chiasmic structure¹¹, typical in Hebrew wisdom literature. Recent translations, including the NAB, indicate that the verse is thus poetic in form, yet Biblical laws were never written in poetic form... Thus the “traditional” use of Genesis 9:6 to bolster the infliction of capital punishment has been judged unwarranted, because such a reading fails to take into account the literary genre of the passage...

There are other anomalies and anachronisms in employing this verse to support modern state executions. There was no established state involved when the text came into being. What it was originally sanctioning was the tribal practice of blood-vengeance, whereby the nearest relative of the victim had the duty to avenge the slaying of his kinsman. In that sense the verse has nothing to do with authorizing the state to kill.

(James J. Megivern. The Death Penalty: A Historical and Theological Survey. Paulist Press.)

¹¹ Chiasmic structure is a literary structure used most notably in the Torah. The structure is comprised of concepts or ideas in an order ABC...CBA so that the first concept that comes up is also the last, the second is the second to last, and so on. Also, a chiasmic structure can also be of the form ABBAABB...ABBA.



Discussion:

1. How does the Megivern passage approach Scriptures? Does it take the text at its literal interpretation or look for the intent behind the words? How do these different readings of Scriptures influence the conclusion one draws from the text? Are both ways equally valid understandings of the texts?

2. Does your interpretation of the Biblical text change in light of this analysis? How so? Do you agree with this analysis? Why or why not?

3. In your opinion, which of the arguments made holds the most weight? Why?

THE DEATH PENALTY IN JEWISH THOUGHT

The following passage explores the varying Jewish positions on the death penalty.

By one Jewish scholar [Samuel Mendelsohn's]¹² count, thirty six capital offenses are found in the [Torah] (eighteen calling for death by stoning, ten by burning, two by decapitation, and six by strangulation), and these in turn fall into variations of thirteen classes of misdeeds: (a) adultery, (b) bestiality, (c) blasphemy, (d) idolatry, (e) incest, (f) kidnapping, (g) maladministration, (h) murder, (i) pederasty, (j) rape, (k) violations of filial duty, (l) violation of the Sabbath (m) witchcraft.

Mendelsohn further notes that of these thirteen classes, four are crimes more immediately offending God, whereas the other nine categories are more immediately repugnant to human society.

This is not the place to delve into what actually went on in ancient Israelite society, but one cannot simply assume that these law codes literally reflect the general practice or that they served as more than symbolic reminders of the demands implicit in living according to the Covenant... But it is clear that at least by the time of the Talmud¹³ there was strong Jewish sentiment against the death penalty. "The most important passage in Rabbinical literature on the topic of capital punishment" records a conversation in which a rabbi said that a Sanhedrin¹⁴ which executes once in seven years is known as destructive. Whereupon "Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariah says, 'once in seventy years,' Rabbi

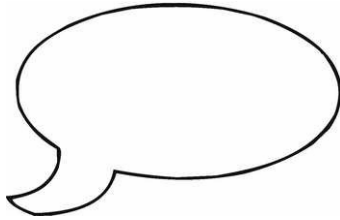
¹² Samuel Mendelsohn (1850-1922) was a rabbi, author, and Jewish scholar who was born in Russia and spent his adult life as a congregational rabbi in the United States.

¹³ The Talmud is a record of rabbinic discussion on Jewish law, ethics, customs, legends, and stories which Jewish tradition considers to be authoritative. It consists of two separate components – the Mishnah (first written compilation of Judaism's oral law around 210 C.E.) and the Gemara (which expands on the Mishnah at the end of the 5th century C.E.). The Talmud serves as the basis for all later Jewish law codes and much of Rabbinic literature.

¹⁴ The Sanhedrin (literally "sitting together" or "assembly") is the name given to the council of 71 Jewish sages who constituted the supreme court and legislative body of Judea during the Roman period. In about 30 C.E., the Sanhedrin lost its authority to inflict capital punishment.

Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba say, if we were in Sanhedrin, no man would ever have been executed.' Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel says 'they (Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiba) would cause the proliferation of blood-shedders in Israel.'"

(James J. Megivern. The Death Penalty: A Historical and Theological Survey. Paulist Press.)



Discussion:

- 1. Why might some of the misdeeds listed be included on a list of crimes to be punished by death? Do they share any common characteristics?**
- 2. If the death penalty was not, in fact, used as punishment for these crimes, what may have been the significance of having such laws on record?**
- 3. Why do you think most of the rabbis had an aversion to using the death penalty as punishment? Do you think they were correct in that decision? Why or why not?**
- 4. How does Rabbi Shimeon ben Gamliel's opinion differ from the other rabbis? On what basis does he think the death penalty should be used? Do you think his opinion is valid? Why or why not?**

THE DEATH PENALTY IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Today and throughout history Christians disagree about whether the death penalty is morally permissible. Among Christians today we can identify three broad perspectives:

- 1. The death penalty is always wrong because it violates the Christian's duty to love unconditionally, just as Christ loved us "even when we were still sinners." It is unacceptable for Christians to participate in executions and unjust for the state to do so because it violates the divine image within which each human is created.*
- 2. The death penalty is permitted only when absolutely necessary to preserve another life or maintain safety within society. The death penalty was therefore acceptable in ancient Israel because that society lacked the sophisticated prison system we have today. This is no longer the case and so the death penalty may not be used in contemporary society. Justice must always be tempered with mercy.*
- 3. Christians ought to support the death penalty precisely because each human life is sacred. In defacing the image of God through the murder of another human being, the murderer deserves to be killed. Any lesser punishment shows a lack of concern for the victim created in God's image. Justice demands punishments equal to the offense.*

The following texts explain these positions in greater detail.

The Old Testament provides us with a rich tradition that demonstrates both God's justice and mercy. The Lord offered to his people Ten Commandments, very basic rules for living from which the Israelites formed their own laws in a covenant relationship with God. Punishment was required, reparations were demanded, and relationships were restored. But the Lord never abandoned his people despite their sins. And in times of trouble, victims relied on God's love and mercy, and then on each other to find comfort and support (Is 57:18-21; Ps 94:19).

Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or reintegration of all into the community.

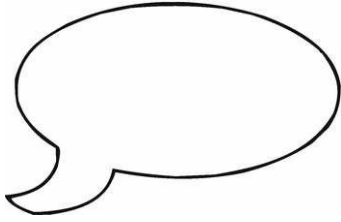
The New Testament builds on this tradition and extends it. Jesus demonstrated his disappointment with those who oppressed others (Mt 23) and those who defiled sacred spaces (Jn 2). At the same time, he rejected punishment for its own sake, noting that we are all sinners (Jn 8). Jesus also rejected revenge and retaliation and was ever hopeful that offenders would transform their lives and turn to be embraced by God's love....

Our sacramental life can help us make sense of our paradoxical approach to crime and punishment. The sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are real encounters with the Saving Lord and central Catholic signs of true justice and mercy. Sinners are encouraged to take responsibility and make amends for their sins; yet we never give up hope that they can be forgiven and rejoin the community.

Centuries ago, St. Thomas Aquinas taught us that punishment of wrongdoers is clearly justified in the Catholic tradition, but is never justified for its own sake. A compassionate community and a loving God seek accountability and correction but not suffering for its own sake. Punishment must have a constructive and redemptive purpose...

The fundamental starting point for all of Catholic social teaching is the defense of human life and dignity: every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and has an inviolable dignity, value, and worth, regardless of race, gender, class, or other human characteristics. Therefore, both the most wounded victim and the most callous criminal retain their humanity. All are created in the image of God and possess a dignity, value, and worth that must be recognized, promoted, safeguarded, and defended.

(Committee on Domestic Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*. Washington, D.C.)



Discussion.

1. **Discuss the reasons cited here not to use the death penalty. Do you agree with these reasons? Why or why not?**
2. **According to Christian religious ideology, are there situations in which using the death penalty may be warranted?**
3. **How does one who believes in the authenticity of the Bible reconcile its call for the use of the death penalty with the teaching of the importance of life and forgiveness?**
4. **How does Jesus' role as the savior play into the use of the death penalty?**

Another Christian View on the Death Penalty

Capital punishment, or the death penalty, refers to the execution by the state of those guilty of certain crimes. Though some have opposed capital punishment for ideological and practical reasons, it is important to note that God mandated its use. This divine mandate occurs first immediately after the Noahic Flood. In Gen. 9:6 God instructs Noah and his sons, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed."

God's reason for issuing this mandate is that humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 9:6). Mankind's creation in the image of God is what makes all human life sacred and can bring a penalty as severe as death for its violation.

The right to exercise capital punishment is reserved for the state, not the individual. There is no place for personal revenge in the administration of this punishment (Rom. 12:19). It is the state's responsibility, as God's civil servant on earth, to protect its citizens and to punish those who harm them (Rom. 13:4,6). Capital punishment provides the state the means to apply the appropriate punishment to the crime (Deut. 19:21)...

Capital punishment remains a valid instrument in the state's administration of justice. Paul affirms that the governing authorities "do not bear the sword (machaira) for nothing" (Rom. 13:4). It is likely that Paul is expressing the general principle that the state has the right to punish its citizens for breaking its laws. More specifically, however, since the machaira (sword) is typically an instrument of death in the New Testament, and certainly in Romans (cf. Rom. 8:35-36), it is evident that the state's authority to administer justice includes capital punishment.

The state possesses this power of death to punish evil (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:13-14); however, only those acts identified by God as evil justify the use of capital punishment (Isa. 5:20). A state that uses capital punishment for something other than punishing evil as defined by God abuses its power and violates God's standard for its use. An example of such an abuse of power is Nazi Germany's killing of millions of Jews.

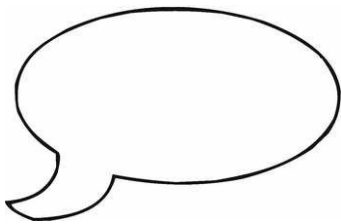
The state does not violate the sixth commandment (“Thou shalt not kill,” Ex. 20:13, Dt. 5:17 KJV) by its proper exercise of capital punishment. The Hebrew word *ratzach*, translated kill in some translations of Ex. 20:13 and Dt. 5:17, refers to acts of murder or homicide. A different word, *harag*, often translated kill, occurs in most other passages in the Old Testament. Rather than violating the sixth commandment by its use of capital punishment, the state actually supports the commandment by executing those who murder.

In order to assure the fair administration of justice God established some important guidelines for Israel, which any state would be wise to adopt, especially in a matter as serious as capital punishment.

1. The accused person must have committed a crime for which death is the appropriate punishment. God states: “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deut. 19:21).¹⁵
2. Clear evidence of guilt must be provided by two or three witnesses. One witness was not sufficient to result in capital punishment (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6). God is aware that unscrupulous people may attempt to use the death penalty for evil purposes. Therefore, He requires multiple witnesses to the supposed crime.
3. Those charged with crimes must be treated in a uniform and impartial manner, regardless of status (Deut. 1:17) or class (Lev. 19:15). Any society that favors some people and discriminates against others because of class or status, or deprives some of adequate defense, intentionally or through neglect, diminishes its integrity and creates serious doubts about its commitment to justice (Lev. 24:22)...

Though capital punishment remains a legitimate option for the state, this option must be exercised under the strictest of conditions. The state that chooses to exercise the power of life and death over its citizenry must be certain it has done all it can to assure that it is punishing the right person, that the punishment fits the crime, and that everyone, regardless of class or status, has had an adequate, vigorous defense. Anything less may bring the condemnation of God on that society.

(Barret Duke. “Capital Punishment.” For Faith and Family Research.
www.faithandfamily.com¹⁶)



Discussion.

1. Discuss the religious arguments that are used to support the death penalty. How do these differ from the arguments against the death penalty?

¹⁵ In commenting on this passage, Jewish scholars throughout the ages have understood it to refer to paying the monetary value of the loss of life or limb.

¹⁶ “For Faith and Family” is a part of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

2. Discuss the difference between personal revenge and state-sponsored capital punishment, as described in the article. Do you agree with this distinction? Why or why not?

3. Does the way some states in the United States use the death penalty follow the guidelines outlined here (i.e., appropriate punishment for the crime, clear evidence of guilt, equal treatment of those charged with the crime, etc)? What are the implications of this on the use of the death penalty?

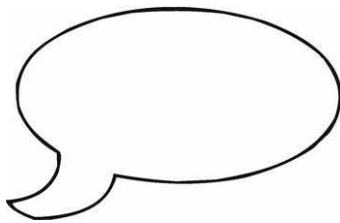
For a joint Catholic-Jewish statement on the death penalty, see the National Catholic/Jewish Consultation's "To End the Death Penalty:"

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/comm/archives/1999/99-288.shtml>

MOVIE CLIP: THE MORALITY OF THE DEATH PENALTY



Use of the death penalty raises many questions of morality. Religion can be used to either support or oppose it, depending on which perspective one takes. Watch the clip from *The Life of David Gale* (34:49-38:28), paying close attention to the religious arguments that are used on both sides.



Discussion.

1. The movie clip mentions that most religious denominations are against the death penalty. **What should be the role of religion in making this decision?**
2. In the debate the governor of Texas says, "I hate killing and my administration will kill to stop it." He cites the quote from Deuteronomy, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" to justify this position. **Do you agree with this logic? Will the death penalty prevent more killing? Or, as Gandhi maintains, does it "leave us all blind?"**
3. **If the death penalty will not actually deter murder, what should our society be doing to stop it? What responsibility do faith groups have to deter murder?**
4. David Gale uses Hitler's quote, "A healthy society must stop at nothing to cleanse itself of evil," against the governor to show that the death penalty is barbaric and can lead to catastrophic damage. **Do you agree with this insinuation? Is there any middle ground between the evils of Hitler and never using the death penalty?**

5. Gale cites flaws in the judicial system as causing the death penalty to be used wrongly against innocent people. **If these problems were corrected and there was a way to ensure an honest and fair trial for those on death row, would use of the death penalty be justified? Is it the death penalty he is against or the flawed judicial process?**

6. At the end of the movie, Gale is put to death for a crime he did not commit, proving that innocent people can be unfairly punished by the death penalty. **Do you think this is a realistic scenario? Does it change your attitude toward the death penalty? How so?**

ACTIVITY: CASE STUDIES

Below are two true examples of individuals on death row. After reading the description of the case, discuss the morality of using the death penalty in each situation. Try to draw on the texts and discussion from earlier in the session. Consider the complicated religious values that may be involved: justice, mercy, repentance, forgiveness.

1. On the night of August 6, 1993 in Cumberland County, North Carolina, a man carrying a pump shotgun and a bottle of beer began shooting into the Kroger supermarket and then entered Luigi's Restaurant, hollering "freeze." Patrons began running out the door and hiding under tables. The man walked through the restaurant, killed four people and wounded numerous others, often firing right in people's faces after they asked for mercy. A Fayetteville police officer who was working as an off-duty guard for Kroger's, heard the shots and, after calling for backup, entered the restaurant and shot the man holding the gun. When another officer approached, the man with the gun raised it and the officer fired twice. Finally, an officer removed the shotgun and placed the man under arrest.

There was little doubt about who had committed the crime; Kenneth Junior French was a 22-year-old mechanic in the Army who had obtained the rank of Sergeant E-5. He had recently moved into a trailer rented by his fiancée, Elaine Sears, and her two children (out of town at the time). The defendant was charged with four counts of first degree murder, eight counts of assault with a deadly weapon with the intent to kill, and one count of discharging a firearm into an occupied building. The defendant pleaded not guilty to all counts. The jury deliberated for two and a half days and returned a verdict of guilty of four counts of first degree murder on the basis of premeditation and deliberation, guilty of three counts of assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill, guilty of four counts of assault with a deadly weapon inflicting serious injury, and guilty of other lesser counts. The jury was then presented with testimony relaying aggravating and mitigating evidence. The aggravating evidence attempted to show that the crime was especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel; that the defendant knowingly created a risk of death to more than one person; and that the murder was part of a course of conduct that included other crimes of violence against other persons.

The mitigating evidence showed another side to French. In the hours leading up to the crime, French sounded a bit strange and rather distraught to family and friends. At one point he called his mother crying and apologizing for not preventing his father's spousal abuse of her, as well as the sexual abuse and rape of his sister. Earlier in the day he had visited some friends, played with their children, gotten a hair cut, rented some videos and returned to the trailer where he was living. He drank some beer and watched a Clint Eastwood video, "The Unforgiven," imitating some of the drinking and shooting that was depicted in the movie. Friends reported that he had stopped by a party but was driving erratically and displaying hyperactive behavior. Other than putting guns into his truck and shooting an older woman, French has little memory of the events of that day. Evidence presented during the penalty phase of the trial attempted to show that French had no significant history of prior criminal activity, that he was relatively young at the time of the crime, that he had a good reputation in the communities in which he lived, that he was a product of a violent and chaotic home, and that he accepted responsibility for the shootings.

2. On a Saturday morning in November 1986, at approximately 10:45 a.m. Ronda Morrison was found dead at the Jackson Cleaners in Monroeville, AL, where she worked. There was no apparent blood, and it appeared she had been sexually assaulted. It also appeared that money had been taken from the cash register. The local police began their investigation without waiting for experts from the state crime lab to arrive. Their search for fingerprints was hindered by the presence of so many prints from customers and by the police's relative inexperience. They did find five spent shell casings from a .25 caliber handgun. A subsequent autopsy revealed three slugs in Ronda's body, including one fired at close range. When an officer from the Alabama Bureau of Investigation finally arrived on the scene, there was fingerprint powder on nearly every surface and Ronda's body had already been taken to the funeral home, thus making accurate fingerprinting and a detailed examination of fibers at the scene, hairs, the exact location of the body, facial expression, the color of the victim's skin, and similar evidence, impossible.

After seven months as an unsolved crime, Ralph Myers, a white man with a long criminal record, was arrested for the murder of another woman. He was questioned about Morrison's murder and stated that Walter McMillian, a 46-year-old black man, had killed Ronda. Two other witnesses corroborated parts of Myers's story. McMillian was reputed to be a marijuana dealer and was dating a white woman from the area. He had a minor criminal record. The defense asked that the trial be moved from Monroe County because of all the publicity surrounding the case. The judge agreed to move the trial to Baldwin County, which had a substantially smaller percentage of black people in its population. Testimony at the trial lasted one and a half days. Myers testified that he heard the shots and when he entered the store to see what had happened, he found McMillian by the victim with money in his hands. Six witnesses testified to McMillian being at home that morning taking part in a fish-fry, and two witnesses said they saw

his car by the cleaners that morning. McMillan was found guilty of first degree murder during a robbery.

(Case studies adapted from Michigan State University and the Death Penalty Information Center, *The Death Penalty: High School Curriculum*.

<http://deathpenaltyinfo.msu.edu/c/courtroom/casestudies/cases.PDF>)



To learn more:

Megivern, James J. The Death Penalty: A Historical and Theological Survey. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

Understanding Capital Punishment: A Guide Through the Death Penalty Debate. Washington D.C: Death Penalty Information Center, 2003.

<http://deathpenaltyinfo.org/>

For Faith and Family Research: <http://faithandfamily.com/>

Deathpenalty.net: <http://www.deathpenalty.net>

Pro-Death Penalty.com: <http://www.prodeathpenalty.com/>

APPENDIX A:

SESSION ONE OF OPEN DOORS, OPEN MINDS I

SESSION ONE: OUR HISTORY, OUR PRESENT

Overview: The first steps are often the most important and most difficult in any journey. This program is a journey of self-discovery, not just of the ways differing faith communities look at a shared text. There is no expected outcome to this program other than mutual understanding and respect. Since, however, issues of faith and belief are highly personal, we must foster a safe environment so that all participants feel comfortable expressing their ideas and doubts.

I. INTRODUCTIONS

A. NAMES AND FAMILY HISTORY:

Naming can be religiously meaningful in both Judaism and Christianity. Our names offer insights into our personal family history and into our cultural and religious heritage.

Discuss the history of the participants' families by inviting each participant to share not only his or her name, but also any family stories related to that name, addressing such questions as:

Is your name a biblical name? Was your first name chosen in honor of a family member or other individual, or is the meaning of your name significant? If so, what significance does the biblical allusion have for you? Does your name provide a hint at where your family comes from or what their occupation was, going several generations back?

**If possible, bring a large world map to the session. As each participant describes his or her family journey to North America, use pushpins and then string of assorted colors to illustrate where each family's journey began.*

B. RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING AND PRACTICE:

Ask each participant to describe his or her own religious upbringing and his or her current affiliation and practice.

How would you describe your religious upbringing and practice? How is your religious observance linked to or different from that of earlier generations in your family?

79. THE ROLE OF STUDY

Our encounters with our sacred texts often shape who we are. During this dialogue, we will explore a number of insightful and formative texts. In particular, we will return several times to one specific shared sacred text, which is one of the most influential and historically important religious texts in Western Civilization: The Ten Commandments.

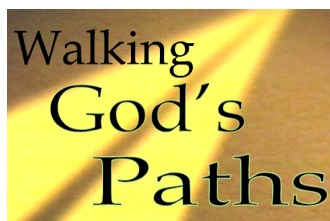
Discuss the role that religious study has in each person's life and their previous understandings of Jewish and Christian study.

Learning and study are central to both Jewish life and Christian life. **What is the role of study in your life? What do you think of when you think about Jews studying? When you think about Christians studying? Are there stereotypes?**

79. VIDEO: SHARED ORIGINS, DIVERSE ROADS

Just as our personal histories and studies shape who we are, so does our communal history. For the remainder of this opening session, we will turn to one particular moment in time that altered forever the history and theology of our traditions: the first century of the Common Era. The video to be shown focuses on the death of Jesus and the destruction of the Jewish Temple.

A. SHOW VIDEO¹⁷



¹⁷ Or read script aloud. We strongly encourage synagogues and churches using this guide to purchase the videos of *Walking God's Paths*, available through the URJ Press (www.urjpress.org). If, however, you are unable to use or obtain the videos, the scripts for each film segment are available online at http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/WALKING_GODS_PATHS/WGP_Users_Guide_Contents.htm. The scripts then could be used in a dramatic reading, with participants reading the parts of the scholars interviewed in the documentary.

B. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sometimes both Jews and Christians are surprised to learn that Judaism in the late Second Temple period was very diverse and included a variety of groups such as the Sadducees, Pharisees, the Qumran community, the Essenes, the Zealots, Diaspora Jews and others. Perhaps this is because in the 21st century people simply assume that rabbinic Judaism (which did not gain ascendancy until centuries later) was already established and dominant. **What about your own faith community today? How are the various types of Jews and Christians distinguished? What are some things on which all Jews or all Christians agree?**

In what ways was Jesus like and unlike his Jewish contemporaries? What about his ministry concerned the Roman governor and the Temple leadership?

The video describes some of the reasons that accounts of the execution of Jesus have set Jews and Christians against one another throughout the centuries. **What are some of the relevant factors? Is it important for people today to know about these issues?**

All Jews, including Jewish followers of Jesus, had to grapple with the destruction of the Temple by the Roman Empire. In the video, Rabbi Lehmann articulates the central issue of how to maintain access to God. Professor Kimelman suggests that Christianity became, in a sense, a Christ-centered Judaism. **How do you react to these ideas? How does Judaism today "maintain access to God?" How does Christianity today do so? What traces of the Temple system are evident in each community?**

What are the implications of these questions for Christian-Jewish relations today?

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Open Door, Open Minds II Evaluation

Names of participating congregations:

What feedback, positive and negative, did you hear from program participants?

For each of the sessions, what did you find most useful? What would you have changed?

SESSION ONE: POVERTY

SESSION TWO: ENVIRONMENT

SESSION THREE: WAR AND PEACE

SESSION FOUR: DEATH PENALTY

What suggestions would you have for another congregation using this material?

Please submit this completed evaluation to

Open Door, Open Minds Evaluation
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Or by email to interreligious@urj.org; or by fax to (202)667-9070 "ATTN: ODOM Evaluation"